

would be off limits. Yet, as we speak, Chairman SHELBY and appropriators in both Chambers are trying to bring months of near stalemate to a close. Last month, a bipartisan-bicameral agreement was reached on subcommittee allocations, and talks continue this week on outstanding issues.

Thanks to the months of delay, we have a long way to go and a very short time in which to do it. I hope that our Democratic colleagues can finally stick to the terms of the budget agreement and keep partisan policy fights out of this process. That is the only way both Chambers will have a chance of being able to vote on funding bills before the end of this year.

That brings us to the USMCA. For the better part of the past year, President Trump's landmark agreement to update North American trade policy has been languishing as Speaker PELOSI and the House Democrats have indulged further and further in impeachment. There are 176,000 new Americans jobs that have sat waiting on ice as the Speaker has offered lukewarm assurances month after month that her caucus is hoping to be "on a path to yes." This week, at long last, it appears that the House Democrats may finally be willing to take action for American workers and job creators and let the House vote on the President's deal. I was pleased to hear that U.S. negotiators, led by Robert Lighthizer, were to head to Mexico today to finalize the details on this important win for the American economy. I hope this forward momentum continues.

So that is the state of play. There is a lot left to do for the American families we represent if our Democratic colleagues will simply allow it, and it will certainly take a great deal of cooperation and consent right here in the Senate if we intend to consider and pass these measures before the end of the year.

Obstruction and stalemate have brought us to the eleventh hour. I hope that, now that we are here, both Chambers will be able to set aside the Democrats' impeachment parade long enough to get the people's business finally finished.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Patrick J. Bumatay, of California, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, for years, President Trump has speculated wildly about a "deep state" conspiracy against his Presidency based on the claim that the FBI opened an investigation into the President's campaign with political bias, with the explicit purpose that they were out to get him.

Yesterday, the Department of Justice inspector general released a report that puts this conspiracy theory to bed. The report conclusively debunks the baseless conspiracy that the investigation into Mr. Trump's campaign and its ties to Russia originated with political bias. In fact, the report quotes the FBI Deputy General Counsel as saying that "the FBI would have been derelict in our responsibility had we not opened the case."

Let me repeat that from the No. 2 counsel at the FBI. "The FBI would have been derelict in our responsibility had we not opened the case."

Donald Trump commits so many wrongs, and when people call him on it, he blames somebody and comes up with a conspiracy. And the most amazing thing is that not just his appointees but these Senators in this Chamber—almost too many of them—just echo those crazy theories designed to divert us from the truth.

The inspector general of the Department of Justice, Michael Horowitz, has been praised for years by Members on both sides of the aisle for his integrity and for his fairness. There is no reason to doubt the report's conclusion. He has never been accused of bias before.

Attorney General Barr and LINDSEY GRAHAM praised Mr. Horowitz, but all of a sudden, they are casting aspersions on him and his report. Only political actors doubt this report—political actors like Attorney General Barr and now, it seems, as well, his handpicked Federal prosecutor, John Durham.

Attorney General Barr has all too often acted on behalf of the President's interests rather than as a neutral law enforcement officer. He almost seems a hatchet man on a political campaign rather than an Attorney General—an august position—following the rule of law and trying to shield that office from politics whenever possible. Instead, Barr loves to jump into the political pool of muck.

I was skeptical when Mr. Barr appointed John Durham simply because

Attorney General Barr had picked him. He does almost nothing in these sensitive areas that are not political. But you had some hope. Durham, some said, had a good reputation. Well, yesterday, Durham's statement confirmed our suspicions that he is not a nonpolitical actor. No prosecutor worth his salt would release a political statement like he did while conducting an investigation. Because of issuing that statement, Durham has lost a great deal of credibility even before he issues his report. No one who is thinking of these things down the middle is going to think Durham is a dispassionate, nonpolitical observer because he has already shown himself to be, in a certain sense, a henchman of Mr. Barr and his political activities.

To emphasize the broad acceptance of the IG report, FBI Director Wray, appointed by President Trump, embraced the report.

When Director Wray asked whether he thought the FBI targeted the Trump campaign, he said I do not. And for that, not surprising, but still rather, again, low, shallow, and disgusting, President Trump lashed out this morning at the FBI Director, saying, "I do not know what the current Director of the FBI was reading, but it wasn't the one given to me."

President Trump, if you actually read the report, you would understand exactly what FBI Director Wray was talking about, and you would understand exactly why it was his duty to defend his department when they behave on a nonpolitical rule of law basis.

My friends, it is a sad state of affairs when truth tellers have no place in Trump's Washington. Anyone inside the Trump administration willing to speak truth to power—Secretary Mattis, DNI Director Coats, even Chief of Staff Kelly towards the end, and so many others—cannot survive the President's insistence on blind loyalty, cannot survive the fact that the President makes them tell lies and mistruths to continue to serve him.

If you do not act in febrile obeisance to President Trump, he will turn on you, so this quality of people in this administration is getting lower and lower and lower. Top-notch people and the ability to govern and make smart decisions and the ability to care about the truth often go hand in hand, but if you care about the truth, you are out, and so Trump loses quality people in his administration. And the only people who survive are willing to bow down to Donald, who will do just what he wants and says, even when they know it is false.

And that is why this administration is so erratic, so disjointed, so ineffective, and, at this time, so unpopular with the majority of the American people. The American people know that Mattis is a fine man. They know that Wray is a fine man. They know that they are the kind of people that, if Trump says tell a lie, they won't. But,

unfortunately, the people in this administration who remain are willing to do just that. And that said, as I said, it is a very sad state of affairs and one of the reasons this administration has such a difficult relationship with the truth.

The President conjures fictions, buys into baseless conspiracy theories told by known buyers on FOX News or somewhere else, and then anyone who contradicts him earns his scorn. Contradict him enough, if you are in the administration, you lose your job.

Now, more worry. Amazingly, this afternoon, the President and Secretary of State Pompeo will meet in secret with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. It shows a blinding disregard with what is going on in Congress and the world right now. Russian intelligence has been pushing the baseless theory that Ukraine interfered in the 2016 elections, not just Putin, as a way to divide the West and defend Putin.

Certain Republican Senators have stunningly repeated that falsehood around these corridors, and now, President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo are meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister in secret. What new conspiracies are they cooking up with Lavrov today? I worry. The President has been so unable to articulate a defense of the facts uncovered in the House impeachment inquiry that he has resorted to one conspiracy after the next to explain his conduct. His allies, including Members of the Senate Republican Caucus, have elevated several of these theories.

Here in the Senate, certain members of the Grand Old Party are forming their own conspiracy caucus. Any crazy conspiracy, whether launched by Putin or some wild-eyed crazy conspiracy theorist, who manages, of course, all the time to get on FOX News and have his story or her story repeated, it is something that my colleagues just repeat even though it is clear they are false, and they know they are false.

ANGUS KING had a great op-ed last week in USA Today, which I commend to every one of my colleagues. It basically said, if what the impeachment proceeding has found is false, then where are the Trump people to refute it? Not to come up with some irrelevant conspiracy theory and bring this one and that one into it that has nothing to do with it, but actually refute the facts, where is that?

President Trump has not refuted a single fact that the impeachment inquiry has found. None of his people have been willing to come forward who would have knowledge to refute those facts if those facts were false. And so they try to create a shiny object, a diversion, and, unfortunately, too many of the news media on the right will spend time on that diversion and repeat Trump's claim that the actual facts are false.

This is the beginning of the end of the democracy, when we can't have

truth—we can disagree on the outcome of those facts, but we can't have truth of the fact—and everything is fake news, particularly those from the right who don't like the truth. When conspiracy theories that have no basis in fact govern, our democracy is at risk. It is one of the main reasons I think so many Americans believe, whatever their ideology, that President Trump should not be President.

The conspiracy theories are not harmless. They are sinister. They are insidious. They erode the democratic fabric of this country. They erode our fidelity of truth which is at the basis of democracy, and they help Putin sow discord in our country. Conspiracies need to stop. If the White House would like to submit evidence or offer witnesses to make the President's case, please do so. They haven't done it once. Instead, the White House is blocking documents and withholding witnesses who could potentially defend the President's action, a surefire sign, as ANGUS KING said in his op-ed, that the President has something to hide.

Given that the House announced it would write two Articles of Impeachment this morning, the White House's refusal to rebut the evidence under oath is something not lost on the Members of the U.S. Senate who could soon be judges and jurors in a Senate trial.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Madam President, on another happier subject, over the weekend, negotiations on the annual defense bill concluded. There are lots of things missing in that bill, things that should have been included but were blocked by the Republican majority in the Senate. But there is one very good thing, among a few others. I am proud that the bill will now provide all Federal employees with 12 weeks of paid parental leave, something Democrats have pursued for a long time.

Once the NDAA is passed—hopefully in the coming week—1 million Federal employees will no longer have to choose between caring for a newborn and putting food on the table. This is huge, huge news. It will make the lives of millions of families better if you have a newborn baby that needs care, he or she. I just had a grandson who turned 1. I know just exactly what it is like. If both mom and dad work or it is a single-parent family, what is that family going to do?

It is one of the nerve-racking decisions that impedes on the joy of the new birth. Well, in many other countries, there is something called paid family leave where you can take off 3 months and raise the child in those early days when he or she is helpless. In the United States, some private companies are progressively doing it, but not enough. Well, now all Federal employees will get that opportunity with parental leave. It recognizes the changes in the world.

When I was growing up, my mom stayed at home while my dad went to work, who was an exterminator. That

is not the norm anymore. Most families have two working parents, and we have lots of single parents who bear the load of raising a family. All it takes is one serious illness, complication, or accident to wreak financial havoc on that family.

It is no surprise that paid family leave ranks near the top of voters' concerns. The United States is the only developed nation in the world that does not guarantee paid leave for parents of newborns or newly adopted. I hope that, after we pass parental leave for Federal employees, employees in the private sector will take notice and they will act as well. If this spreads throughout America, as often Federal policies do, it will be a great thing for our parents and our children.

Today, only 16 percent of workers in the private sector have access to paid leave. Studies overwhelmingly show that, when working parents can take care of their families without the fear of losing jobs, families are better off, and the economy is better off as well. So I am glad that the long push we have made on this side of the aisle for parental leave has been secured for all family workers. I hope it will become a reality soon for all workers, and I want to thank my colleagues who helped make this a reality.

NET NEUTRALITY

Madam President, on net neutrality, this Saturday marks the second anniversary of the FCC's party-line decision to repeal the net neutrality rules. To restore the safeguards of a free and open net that those rules protected, today my colleagues Senators MARKEY, CANTWELL, and WYDEN will ask the Senate's consent to pass the Save the Internet Act, which codifies net neutrality in a similar manner to last year's Congressional Review Act, which passed the Senate with strong bipartisan support.

I thank those Senators and so many others for their leadership on this important and sometimes overlooked issue. Net neutrality is based on a very simple idea, that the internet, just like our phones, our highways, our power sources, is a public good that all Americans should have access to without discrimination, whether you are a big company or a startup, a rural school or an individual consumer just like water companies can't discriminate if they come to their customers and say, oh, I am going to charge you \$10 for a day's use of water, but I am going to charge your neighbor down the street \$100. That would be unfair. We would not allow it. The same thing should be true with the internet.

Under the Obama administration, net neutrality rules prevented moneyed groups from getting preferential treatment. We should return to it. The administration has, unfortunately, sided with big special interests and repealed it. Senator MARKEY's legislation would restore the rules of the world that protect a free and open internet.

I thank my colleagues for bringing this to the Senate's attention today.